

Dawson schools aim for individual learning

BY ERIN SCHMITT
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DAWSON SPRINGS — Individual growth is the best measure to see how every student improves from year-to-year, according to Dawson Springs Independent Schools Superintendent Charles Proffitt.

"We're very student-focused in Dawson Springs and we believe there is no bar too high," Proffitt said.

With that said, he added, the state has raised education standards on all schools and districts with the new accountability model, Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP).

Dawson Springs has been working toward exceeding state goals and has shown marked improvement over the last year, he said. However, due to the change to K-PREP, the progress is not readily reflected in state testing scores.

For instance, schools are measured on a 100 point scale instead of 140, and there is no longer an apprentice and novice categories. Instead there is a needs improvement category, which accounts for 69 percent of all school districts, including Dawson Springs.

The district received 57 out of 100 points and was ranked in the 61st percentile overall for Kentucky.

Proffitt said the goal for next year is to reach proficient, with sights set on a distinguished ranking. He would also like to see the state labels the district progressing each year.

A lot of legwork was done prior to state testing scores being released, so parents and board members would understand the new accountability model, Proffitt said.

Dawson Springs Elementary received 58.3 points and was ranked in the 53rd percentile. It falls in the needs improvement category.

The elementary school performed much better than last year, though it's not apparent by comparing the previous year's test scores. Proffitt said a more accurate measurement is looking at the rankings for both years.

"Last year our elementary was in the lower quadrant of those rankings," he said. "This year they are right in the middle. That shows they have improved. Next year we're going to look to be in the top quadrant of those elementary scores."

The middle school was categorized as proficient with an 81st percent ranking and 61.8 points out of 100. Dawson Springs students in grades sixth through eighth had the highest scores in its district, which includes the Hopkins, Christian and Caldwell school systems

and second highest in the region.

The high school didn't fare as well, Proffitt said, but that's in part because of the calculated graduation rate.

As a smaller high school, Dawson Springs is at a disadvantage when it comes to graduation rates. Just one student leaving can negatively impact the graduation rate quite a bit, he said.

Graduation rates are calculated by taking the number of freshmen and sophomore students and averaging with how many of those students graduated from the same high school. It doesn't take into consideration if a student left the school and graduated elsewhere.

"For us being a small school district, we lose a student, even if it's to Hopkins or Caldwell counties, that really hurts our graduation rate," Proffitt said.

Beginning with next school year, the state is switching to a cohort model, which will take into account if a student graduates from any high school, not just the one he or she attended as a freshman and sophomore.

Dawson Springs High School scored 53.6 points and was ranked in the 43rd percentile, which falls under needs improvement.

Out of the five components school districts are measured on, Proffitt said he's proudest of growth.

The growth category shows what schools are doing for each student in the district, he explained, adding he thinks it's the

best measure.

"Our goal is to take a student from wherever they are and to create stepping stones for them in their education that they can grow and be college and career-ready," the superintendent said.

In the past, once a student reached distinguished, there wasn't further advancement expectations from the state, Proffitt said. Under K-PREP, each student, regardless if they are needs improvement or distinguished should show growth from year to year.

"That's part of the reason why there is no bar too high," he said. "We want to not just move them into a category, but beyond."

Being college and career ready is also a component of K-PREP.

The state has been pushing for schools to offer more AP courses. Dawson students may take English 1, English 2 and technology ready AP courses.

Dawson is looking at adding more dual-credit AP courses, he said. The district is in talks with Madisonville Community College and Murray State.

Proffitt said dual credit would be in the best interest of the students. Not only could they earn AP credit, but they would also earn dual credit hours that would count toward college.

Dawson is analyzing not just how a student does overall on testing, but is looking at each skill set to make sure they are up to par, he said. Remediation

courses are then developed based on students' individual needs.

"We want it to be in the specific skills that the child was weak in," Proffitt said. "That way it's not a waste of their time and they're seeing the need for it."

This is done at every grade level, from high school to elementary.

"Everything we're addressing is student-focused," he said. "In the past we said student-focused, but we were still thinking a group of students. Now it's the individual student. There is no reason why every child is not advancing."

Low test scores bother school board members

Poor test scores and what can be done to improve them brought about some soul searching at Monday night's meeting of the Letcher County Board of Education. Frustrated board members think students have the potential — with proper help from teachers and administrators — to excel at higher levels than the test scores show.

When the results of Kentucky's new academic achievement testing system were released earlier this month, the Letcher County school system ranked 152 of 174 school

districts in the state. All but one of the county's 15 elementary, middle and high schools were placed in the "Needs Improvement" category. Fleming-Neon Middle School was the lone success story, ranking as "proficient."

The subject of the Letcher County schools' performance on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress tests, which replaced the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System that had been in place since 1990, came after the district's director of assessment and accountability, Jackie Collins, reported to the board on a meeting of principals and "leadership teams" and their plans to improve student achievement.

"Almost every single school came up with the same problems," said Collins. "They wanted some very active and purposeful student engagement. They want kids doing the work instead of teachers. Many of them thought we need to teach our children to critically think. We are not judging individual teachers; we are looking at it as an entire school."

"I did not get up on the wrong side of the bed so don't get me wrong," replied Board Member Sam Quillen Jr., a Neon dentist. "I have heard this report before. I have heard this for several years and it does not seem like it is working. We were told a few years ago that we as a board could start seeing improvements. We as a board were told, if I am not mistaken, that we were going to be working with teachers who routinely scored low in their (student's achievement tests) and we would know who

they are they would be offered help to try to bring those test scores up."

"I'd like to see that," Quillen continued. "If we have people not doing their job in this district semester after semester, year after year —

and I know I will probably make people mad by saying this, but I think that is our job — I would like to know who they are and what is being done about it and why we have kids who are not doing as well as they should be in Letcher County."

"I'm sorry if I have stepped on any toes. I may have, but I have been sitting in this seat a long time and hearing the reports. It seems like sometimes it is repetitive on things I have heard before, but yet we are not doing what we should be doing and not seeing the results in the classroom."

Remarking on what he sees as the need for more accountability from teachers and administrators, Board Member John Spicer of Seco said, "I never had a job in my life I could be complacent in. I would have already gotten fired many times."

Statewide, more than two-thirds of the schools and districts are in the "needs improvement" category — a statistic Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said should not be seen as "an indicator of failure."

Letcher Schools Superintendent Anna Craft said she has never seen the district's teachers "work as hard as they are working."

Craft said that during the week after the test scores were released on November 2, "everybody was kind of angry. I said, 'You are going to be out there a minimum of three days a week all day long. You are going to work with the principal; you are going to work with the staff.'"

While acknowledging that if teachers and administrators "don't get our student achievement up we are not doing our job," she also pointed out that employees are "working longer hours" without receiving

any significant pay raise in a number of years.

"This board has given them a one-percent raise in six years," said Craft. "They have had no raise and they are asked to do more and more. We have had 16 people retire this past year. We already know a 'gob' who are going to retire this year. The pool of teachers applying anywhere in the state is going down, down, down. I don't think we thank our teachers enough. I don't think we give them enough credit. They are missionaries. They are not in it for the money. I can tell you that. Teachers love their children. Aides love them (too)."

Craft said that Fleming-Neon Middle School did well on the testing "because they worked hard (and) pulled together." She said other schools worked equally as hard, but just couldn't achieve the same results.

"Some of our other schools, they were devastated," she said. "They worked as hard. They made gains, but they didn't make the total gains. We're searching for answers. We are trying to provide all the help we can."

Collins, the assessment and accountability director, said teachers and administrators "need to get the children more involved" if test scores are to go up.

"We've got people who are working so hard who have that love for children," Collins said. "We're just trying to redirect them (children) in the right direction. If I do all the work for you (a student) and give you all the answers, I am not teaching you how to be a productive citizen outside the classroom."

"If you find yourself in a hole, quit digging," replied Quillen. "Sometimes I get frustrated when I see that our kids aren't doing as well as other kids. I'm not saying that we are digging, but sometimes you need to stop digging and figure out what is happening."

Quillen concluded: "I know you are working hard. I know our teachers are working hard. We've got to do something to turn it

around. I think that is what we want as a board, (that) every school be proficient or getting pretty dagburn close to it. If we are satisfied or complacent with what is going on then we are not doing our job."

"This board sets its goals

The Sentinel-News Shelbyville Nov 28, 2012

Southside, low scoring schools working to improve

When the state announced the first scores in its new test model last month, Southside ranked near the bottom. But with some time to investigate the scores, district officials are working to push students and teachers to improve the scores.

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About one month removed from the state's announced scores in the first year of Kentucky new assessment system, districts and individual schools are beginning to understand their scores more clearly.

Shelby County's overall district score was a little better than the middle of the pack statewide, falling in the 56th percentile and four schools earned proficient classifications, ranking in the 70th percentile or above in the state.

However, it was Southside Elementary, the smallest school in the district, that had the most eye-opening results.

Although three of the district's four highest performing schools were elementary schools, Southside was the lowest-performing

school, ranking in the 14th percentile.

The Collins eighth-grade class ranked in the 13th percentile, but that is misleading because the single class was ranked against all middle schools.

The sixth- and seventh-grade classes at West Middle were the district's fourth proficient classified school. The school was also classified as a Focus School, because its proficient and distinguished scores in Gap categories (ethnicity, free and reduced lunch, special education and limited English proficiency) were too far from the student population score based on a formula.

SCPS Superintendent James Neihof described the score as "surprising" when it came out.

"Overall, the score obviously was not what we wanted," said Lisa Smith, deputy superintendent and chief academic officer for the district. "But we've already started to put things in place to work on it."

With the new test came new levels of rigor that students were asked to learn, and Smith said Southside missed the goals.

"We have several things we've started to look at," she said, "including instruction. Are our teachers meeting the needs for students to master the new standards?"

One issue the district has noticed as it goes deeper and deeper into the standards is the unusually high number of students

see ■ **SOUTHSIDE** on page A9

■ Southside

continued from page A1

scoring apprentice at Southside, which is on a scale of novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished levels.

Among elementary schools, scores were provided in reading and math for third grade, and reading, math, science and language mechanics in fourth grade and reading, math, social studies and writing in fifth grade.

At Southside, the percentage of students scoring apprentice was the highest in five of the 10 categories, and novice was the highest percentage in four other categories.

To help advance those students one or more levels to proficient and distinguished, Smith said the district is trying to find what works and incorporate that concept at all the schools.

"One thing we're trying to do is track the scores down to each individual child and see exactly where that child is struggling," she said.

"Another thing we're doing, which we started on this summer, is writing common units and assessments. That way there is continuity across the dis-

trict. And at Southside, especially in grades four and five, we've started to work on departmentalization."

Smith described that as having teachers focus their efforts in one subject. While all teachers in elementary school will work with home rooms on language arts and reading, using departmentalization can allow teachers to focus their work outside of homeroom on math or science.

"That way a teacher can intently focus on one set of standards, allowing them to understand that set better," she said.

Both Painted Stone and Wright Elementary schools, Smith said, use departmentalization with fourth- and fifth-grade classes.

Smith said teachers and administrators already are starting to see some results, but this process is going to take time.

"I think things are going very well," she said. "We are not wasting time. There is certainly a sense of urgency to see Southside and all of our schools continue to improve."

"This was a benchmark year, the first year of these tests. With the old account-

ability standards, we could use MAP [Measures of Academic Progress] tests to kind of predict where students were going to place, whether it was apprentice, proficient or distinguished. But we haven't figured out how to predict that yet. It's something we're working on."

Smith said the schools are also working together, teaching successful methods to one another.

"We're learning more from each other," she said. "If something or someone is doing something right, we all want to learn how to do it."

[Southside Principal] Mrs. [Susanne] Burkhardt has had teachers visiting other classes and with other teachers to try and see what has been successful in their classrooms."

But what will be most important is getting students, at Southside and the rest of the schools in the district to continue to improve.

"We know what the mark is for the standards, and our children should be able to hit it," Smith said. "We need to make sure our students display a mastery of the standards at the level intended."

Parents brace for results of new tests

JCPS mailing first scores under higher standards

By Antoinette Konz

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The Courier-Journal

12/2/12

The parents of nearly 57,000 Jefferson County students will find out this week just how well their children stack up academically with the rest of Kentucky —and some may not like what they learn.

Jefferson County Public Schools is mailing out individual performance reports on Kentucky's rigorous new statewide tests for students in third through eighth, 10th and 11th grades.

Last month, Kentucky released results for schools and districts in its new Unbridled Learning testing system, which showed that the state's raised academic standards took an expected toll on reading and math proficiency rates. Educators are warning parents that their children's scores also may be lower than they expect.

"The bar has been raised," said Erica Thompson, Jefferson County's district assessment coordinator. "A child who scored proficient before may now score apprentice or novice. We are asking parents to look over their child's report, but also keep in mind that this is only one indication as to how well students are doing." District-wide, about 42 percent of JCPS elementary students, 38 percent of middle-schoolers and 51 percent of high-schoolers scored proficient or better in reading. That's a significant drop from last year, when proficiency levels for all three, under less rigorous standards, ranged from 60 to 70 percent. Math proficiency rates in the new system also were lower, ranging from 33 to 46 percent, depending on the grade level, compared with 52 to 63 percent proficiency last year. Officials have cautioned against comparing this year's scores directly with those of past years, since the testing standards have changed. And while math and reading scores may be lower, officials say science and social studies results should be in line with previous years, because the content has not changed in those subjects. The results being mailed to parents this week involve the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP) test that third- through eighth-graders, sophomores and juniors took last spring. The test featured questions that allow individual students to compare their results with their peers. That wasn't possible with previous state tests.

A different look, more information

The report parents receive in the mail will look different than in years past — a move by the state to simplify results that had been confusing to parents.

"These student reports are much more user-friendly," says Harrie Buecker, the former superintendent of Franklin County Schools who now works in the College of Education at the University of Louisville.

"You will now be looking at your child's growth over a period of time," Buecker said. "In the past, you just received a proficiency number and performance level, and that didn't really tell you a whole lot in terms of what they need." Thompson said she thinks people will like the new format, which also allows parents to compare their child's performance to the average scores for students in their school, in their district and across the state. "You will have three points of comparison for looking at your child's score on the front page of the report," Thompson said. In addition, on the second page of the report, parents will be able to see their child's national percentile ranking — something not available before. "It is designed to show how their child did compared to other kids of the same grade at the same time the test was taken," Thompson said. "The same set of questions were presented to kids nationwide."

JCPS principals have had online access to the individual student reports for about a month and say they are ready to help explain the results to parents and work on a plan to help children improve. "We've been preparing our parents for the last several weeks, especially our fifth-grade parents because a lot of middle schools — especially the magnet schools — will look at the results," said Angela Hosch, principal at Portland Elementary School.

MORE

Working with students

Hosch said she and her staff have already started using the test results to tailor education to each student's needs. "I tell my teachers that it's almost like a triage," she said. "You look at the immediate need, group them together with others who share similar needs and then provide them with the appropriate instruction they need to heal and get where they need to be. And now that our parents will know what the results are, they can help us." Many parents say they are anxious to see the results.

"There has been a lot of buildup to this year's test scores and I just want to know how he did," said Loretta Smith, whose grandson attends Crosby Middle School in Middletown. "It seems to me that parents should have these results a lot sooner — half of the school year is almost over, and we are now getting results from tests they took in May."

District officials said it took them a few weeks to get individual results from the state and run them through a series of quality-control checkpoints to ensure the correct scores go to the right homes.

In addition, JCPS is paying United Mail \$35,000 to merge test reports with student address files, put the reports in envelopes and mail them to parents.

"It is very time-consuming for confidentiality purposes," Thompson said. "We have to ensure the right scores go to the right homes."

Last year, thousands of scores for the eighth-grade EXPLORE test were delivered to wrong addresses, raising privacy concerns.

State officials acknowledge that the new testing system delayed getting results to schools and school districts this year, but that should not be the case in years to come, said Lisa Gross, a spokesperson for the Kentucky Department of Education. "Our goal is to get the results to school districts prior to the start of the school year," Gross said.

Raising academic standards

The new testing system is a key component of Senate Bill 1, enacted in 2009 by the Kentucky General Assembly, which mandated a new public school assessment and accountability program beginning with the 2011-12 school year. The law also called for more rigorous academic standards aimed at having students develop a deeper understanding of concepts, and not just the ability to regurgitate facts or formulas.

Kentucky schools responded by adopting Common Core Standards in reading and math, which are designed to be more rigorous and better aligned with college coursework and 21st-century workplace skills. Kentucky was the first to adopt those standards; since then, 46 other states have followed suit. The new standards were first taught last school year, and Kentucky was the first to test them last spring.

"We expected that with the higher standards, a lot of our students would not be proficient," said JCPS Superintendent Donna Hargens. "Any time you raise the bar, the initial results are going to be lower than they were before."

"We are prepared for these results and are ready to use this new data to provide more support for our students and help them succeed."

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MORE

Q&A: What has changed with Ky.'s new test system?

By Antoinette Konz

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The Courier-Journal

Here are some questions and answers about the new testing system.

QUESTION: What's new about this year's test scores?

ANSWER: For the first time, Kentucky will report data for the new Unbridled Learning accountability model.

Q: Why is there a new system?

A: Senate Bill 1, enacted in 2009 by the state legislature, eliminated the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System and called for a new testing and measurement system, plus new academic standards in core subjects. Kentucky adopted the Common Core Standards in reading and math in 2010, with students first tested on them last spring.

Q: What are Common Core Standards?

A: These standards aim to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. The standards are designed to be challenging and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that students need for success in college and careers.

Q: What happened to

No Child Left Behind?

A: Since the federal No Child Left Behind Act was passed in 2001, schools and districts received two "scores" — one for CATS and one for NCLB. In September 2011, the U.S. Department of Education announced that states could apply for a waiver from No Child Left Behind and develop

their own accountability standards. Kentucky was granted a waiver, which means public schools and districts now receive just one score.

Q: What happened to

AYP?

A: Adequate yearly progress was the measure used under No Child Left Behind to determine whether schools were meeting academic standards. Schools that made AYP weren't subject to consequences such as allowing students to transfer to better-performing schools or school overhauls. In the new system, each school and district will instead have an "annual measurable objective" that is based on a 100-point scale. Because this is the first year of the test, schools and districts won't have an AMO until next year.

Q: Can the new test scores and accountability measures be compared to previous years' tests?

A: No. Kentucky adopted new standards in reading and math, and the tests for those subjects cover different items and are more challenging. The accountability labels are also different from those in the past.

Q: How can I get a copy of test scores for my child or his school?

A: The Courier-Journal has posted the results for every school in every district at www.courier-journal.com/schoolresults. JCPS is sending out individual reports to parents this week; parents may also go to their child's school and request copies of the results.

Q: What do these scores mean for my child?

A: Unbridled Learning is designed to judge individual schools, not individual students. However, the results are designed to let a parent know if a child is ready for college or a career as early as third grade. Parents may use these results to compare their child's progress against the school's. They can also use the results as one indicator — along with class work, other test scores and teacher and home observations — of their child's progress.

Q: Are there specific results parents should pay particular attention to?

A: Officials say parents should look not just at how their child scored, but at how the district and state and other schools scored. Because this is a new test and the standards are higher, it is likely that some children who previously scored proficient will score lower this year. Officials are urging parents not to panic and saying that the results will get better.

Q: How can I help my child's school do better?

A: Ask your child's teacher or principal what efforts the school has undertaken to improve. Ask what you can do to help the school reach its goals. That may include helping at the school or doing activities at home with your child.

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Better K-12 schools helping postsecondary efforts

Courier-Journal 12/4/12

The *Courier Journal's* front-page article entitled, "Louisville's 55,000 college-degree effort hits hurdle," has prompted this set of observations.

First, do not despair. This effort by the political, education, business and philanthropic leadership in the community is exactly the right thing to do, and annual fluctuations in population and attainment levels are less important than developing foundational activities vital to long-term success. The good news is that these activities are starting to emerge.

Second, the data we regularly track here at the Council on Postsecondary Education provide convincing evidence that success in higher education is highly dependent on the success of students in K-12. To that end, the implementation of Senate Bill 1 (2009), which is driving the adoption of our new Common Core Standards, is starting to bear promising fruit. This effort has brought about a long overdue alignment between what children are learning in K-12 and what they need to know to be successful in credit-generating college courses. Previously, this lack of alignment led to nearly half of all students entering our colleges and universities being required to take remedial courses. Graduation rates for these students are half the rate of students who enter college ready to take credit-generating courses.

In the first year of reported results, State Education Commissioner Terry Holliday announced that the proportion of high school seniors graduating "college ready," as determined by examinations used by all of our colleges and universities, rose an astonishing 9 percent in a single year. This year-over-year improvement is a testament to the new standards and to our teachers, principals, superintendents and collegiate faculty who have been working collaboratively with Commissioner Holliday for the last three years to implement the changes directed by Senate Bill 1. As this process unfolds in the years ahead, there is every reason to believe we will see significant improvement in the proportion of students graduating high school who are college and career ready.

Third, there is a clear understanding within the community's leadership that having a high-performing public school system will create the dual benefits of: 1) making the community that much more attractive to prospective employers and employees considering Kentucky as a place to locate; and 2) creating the intellectual foundation within our own young people to allow them to succeed in postsecondary education, whether at a community and technical college or at a four-year institution. Achievement of this second element enhances the attractiveness of the community through our ability to promote Louisville as having one of the best educated, best trained workforces in the nation.

We have much to do and much improvement to make. But the seeds recently planted are establishing the sturdy root system necessary to support a healthy, robust educational system. Stay the course.

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State education officials defend test goals to board

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By Janet Cappiello – Associated Press

Herald-Leader

LOUISVILLE — Some Kentucky board of education members asked Wednesday whether the goals set by the state are high enough to lift up low-performing schools.

Since test scores were released in November, critics have questioned why low-performing schools only have to move up one point next year to be considered improving.

"If you start at 38, you're still a long way from 100," said member Roger Marcum. "Is that a significant enough progress for a school that's low in achieving?"

But Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday chided board members, saying the new assessments evaluate schools on several factors to determine success. That differs from the No Child Left Behind Law, from which the state received a waiver. He also said the one-point goal is reasonable.

Holliday said if half of the schools meet the one-point goal next year and half don't, then "we want to keep one. We won't know until we get that data."

Under the new assessments, schools are classified as distinguished, proficient and needs improvement. The 2012 data showed 899 Kentucky elementary, middle and high schools needed improvement, 260 were proficient and 137 were distinguished.

Associate commissioner Ken Draut stressed that the one-point goal was a secondary consideration, and that the No. 1 priority for low-performing schools is to reach proficiency. "If you achieve it, you get the label called 'progressing,'" Draut said.

Marcum said he's concerned about the public perception of the one-point goal, saying if a low-performing school meets that goal, "that can tend to make them think everything's OK here ... when the school is low-achieving."

Draut said a panel of experts has called the goal appropriate. As late as Tuesday, he said, officials consulted with the National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability, a state-mandated three-person panel that advises on education testing and measurement issues.

"But what they advised was you really need to stay the course a year or two to see what happens and how does this grow?" he said.

In other business, Education Department staff said goals are set to:

- Increase the percentage of children ready for kindergarten from 28.1 percent this year to 64.1 percent in 2015-2016;
- Increase the average combined reading and math scores for elementary and middle school students on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress tests from 44 percent this year to 72 percent in 2017;
- Increase the average combined reading and math scores for third-grade students on the KPREP tests from 46.1 percent in 2012 to 73.1 percent in 2017.

Board member Brigitte Ramsey questioned whether new kindergarten-readiness measures used in a pilot program this year were sufficient because they tested only cognitive abilities. The tests are expected to be implemented statewide next year.

Ramsey said the state should also include a social and emotional component in the testing.

But Holliday said those questions are more appropriate for the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education. He said the department's interest was in "how far behind our kids are in cognitive development."